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THE CAPTURE OF JOHN BROWN.

At noon of Monday, October 18, 1859, Chief Clerk Walsh, of the Navy Department, drove rapidly into the Washington Navy-yard, and, meeting me, asked me how many marines we had stationed at the barracks available for immediate duty. I happened to be the senior officer present and in command that day. I instantly replied to Mr. Walsh that we had ninety men available, and then asked him what was the trouble. He told me that Ossawatomic Brown, of Kansas, with a number of men, had taken the arsenal at Harper's Ferry, and was then besieged there by the Virginia State troops. Mr. Walsh returned speedily to the Navy Department building, and, in the course of an hour, orders came to me from Secretary Tousey to proceed at once to Harper's Ferry and report to the senior officer ; and, if there should be no such officer at the Ferry, to take charge and protect the government property. With a detachment of ninety marines, I started for Harper's Ferry that afternoon on the 3:30 train, taking with me two howitzers. It was a beautiful, clear autumn day, and the men, exhilarated by the excitement of the occasion, which came after a long, dull season of confinement in the barracks, enjoyed the trip exceedingly.

At Frederick Junction I received a dispatch from Colonel Robert E. Lee, who turned out to be the army officer to whom I was to report. He directed me to proceed to Sandy Hook, a small place about a mile this side of the Ferry, and there await his arrival. At ten o'clock in the evening he came up on a special train from Washington. His first order was to form the marines out of the car, and march from the bridge to Harper's Ferry. This we did, entering the inclosure of the arsenal grounds through a back gate. At eleven o'clock Colonel Lee ordered the volunteers to march out of the grounds, and gave the control inside to the marines, with instructions to see that none of the insurgents escaped during the night. There had been hard fighting all the preceding day, and

Brown and his men kept quiet during the night. At half-past six in the morning Colonel Lee gave me orders to select a detail of twelve men for a storming party, and place them near the engine-house in which Brown and his men had intrenched themselves. I selected twelve of my best men, and a second twelve to be employed as a reserve. The engine-house was a strong stone building, which is still in a good state of preservation at the Ferry, in spite of the three days' fighting in the building by Brown and his men, and the ravages of the recent war between the States. The building was of stone, perhaps thirty feet by thirty-five. In the front were two large double doors, between which was a stone abutment. Within were two old-fashioned, heavy fire-engines, with a hose-cart and reel standing between them, and just back of the abutment between the doors. They were double-battered doors, very strongly made, with heavy wrought-iron nails. Lieutenant J. E. B. Stewart, afterwards famous as a cavalry commander on the side of the South, accompanied Colonel Lee as a volunteer aid. He was ordered to go with a part of the troops to the front of the engine-house and demand the surrender of the insurgent party. Colonel Lee directed him to offer protection to Brown and his men, but to receive no counter-proposition from Brown in regard to the surrender. On the way to the engine-house, Stewart and myself agreed upon a signal for attack in the event that Brown should refuse to surrender. It was simply that Lieutenant Stewart would wave his hat, which was then, I believe, one very similar to the famous chapeau which he wore throughout the war. I had my storming party ranged alongside of the engine-house, and a number of men were provided with sledge-hammers with which to batter in the doors. I stood in front of the abutment between the doors. Stewart hailed Brown and called for his surrender, but Brown at once began to make a proposition that he and his men should be allowed to come out of the engine-house and be given the length of the bridge start, so that they might escape. Suddenly Lieutenant Stewart waved his hat, and I gave the order to my men to batter in the door. Those inside fired rapidly at the point where the blows were given upon the door. Very little impression was made with the hammers, as the doors were tied on the inside with ropes and braced by the hand-brakes of the fire-engines, and in a few minutes I gave the order to desist. Just then my eye caught sight of a ladder, lying a few feet from the

engine-house, in the yard, and I ordered my men to catch it up and use it as a battering-ram. The reserve of twelve men I employed as a supporting column for the assaulting party. The men took hold bravely and made a tremendous assault upon the door. The second blow broke it in. This entrance was a ragged hole low down in the right-hand door, the door being splintered and cracked some distance upward. I instantly stepped from my position in front of the stone abutment, and entered the opening made by the ladder. At the time I did not stop to think of it, but upon reflection I should say that Brown had just emptied his carbine at the point broken by the ladder, and so I passed in safely. Getting to my feet, I ran to the right of the engine which stood behind the door, passed quickly to the rear of the house, and came up between the two engines. The first person I saw was Colonel Lewis Washington, who was standing near the hose-cart, at the front of the engine-house. On one knee, a few feet to the left, knelt a man with a carbine in his hand, just pulling the lever to reload.

"Hello, Green," said Colonel Washington, and he reached out his hand to me. I grasped it with my left hand, having my saber uplifted in my right, and he said, pointing to the kneeling figure, "This is Ossawatomie."

As he said this, Brown turned his head to see who it was to whom Colonel Washington was speaking. Quicker than thought I brought my saber down with all my strength upon his head. He was moving as the blow fell, and I suppose I did not strike him where I intended, for he received a deep saber cut in the back of the neck. He fell senseless on his side, then rolled over on his back. He had in his hand a short Sharpe's-cavalry carbine. I think he had just fired as I reached Colonel Washington, for the marine who followed me into the aperture made by the ladder received a bullet in the abdomen, from which he died in a few minutes. The shot might have been fired by some one else in the insurgent party, but I think it was from Brown. Instinctively as Brown fell I gave him a saber thrust in the left breast. The sword I carried was a light uniform weapon, and, either not having a point or striking something hard in Brown's accouterments, did not penetrate. The blade bent double.

By that time three or four of my men were inside. They came rushing in like tigers, as a storming assault is not a play-day sport.

They bayoneted one man skulking under the engine, and pinned another fellow up against the rear wall, both being instantly killed. I ordered the men to spill no more blood. The other insurgents were at once taken under arrest, and the contest ended. The whole fight had not lasted over three minutes. My only thought was to capture, or, if necessary, kill, the insurgents, and take possession of the engine-house.

I saw very little of the situation within until the fight was over. Then I observed that the engine-house was thick with smoke, and it was with difficulty that a person could be seen across the room. In the rear, behind the left-hand engine, were huddled the prisoners whom Brown had captured and held as hostages for the safety of himself and his men. Colonel Washington was one of these. All during the fight, as I understood afterward, he kept to the front of the engine-house. When I met him he was as cool as he would have been on his own veranda entertaining guests. He was naturally a very brave man. I remember that he would not come out of the engine-house, begrimed and soiled as he was from his long imprisonment, until he had put a pair of kid gloves upon his hands. The other prisoners were the sorriest lot of people I ever saw. They had been without food for over sixty hours, in constant dread of being shot, and were huddled up in the corner where lay the body of Brown's son and one or two others of the insurgents who had been killed. Some of them have endeavored to give an account of the storming of the engine-house and the capture of Brown, but none of the reports have been free from a great many misstatements, and I suppose that Colonel Washington and myself were the only persons really able to say what was done. Other stories have been printed by people on the outside, describing the fight within. What they say must be taken with a great deal of allowance, for they could not have been witnesses of what occurred within the engine-house. One recent account describes me as jumping over the right-hand engine more like a wild beast than a soldier. Of course nothing of the kind happened. The report made by Colonel Lee at the time, which is now on file in the War Department, gives a more succinct and detailed account than any I have seen.

I can see Colonel Lee now, as he stood on a slight elevation, about forty feet from the engine-house, during the assault. He was in civilian dress, and looked then very little as he did during

the war. He wore no beard, except a dark mustache, and his hair was slightly gray. He had no arms upon his person, and treated the affair as one of no very great consequence, which would be speedily settled by the marines. A part of the scene, giving color and life to the picture, was the bright blue uniform of the marines. They wore blue trousers then, as they do now, and a dark blue frock-coat. Their belts were white, and they wore French fatigue caps. I do not remember the names of the twelve men in the storming party, nor can I tell what became of them in later life. We had no use for the howitzers, and, in fact, they were not taken from the car.

Immediately after the fight, Brown was carried out of the engine-house, and recovered consciousness while lying on the ground in front. A detail of men carried him up to the paymaster's office, where he was attended to and his wants supplied. On the following day, Wednesday, with an escort, I removed him to Charleston, and turned him over to the civil authorities. No handcuffs were placed upon him, and he supported himself with a self-reliance and independence which were characteristic of the man. He had recovered a great deal from the effects of the blow from my saber, the injury of which was principally the shock, as he only received a flesh wound. I had little conversation with him, and spent very little time with him.

I have often been asked to describe Brown's appearance at the instant he lifted his head to see who was talking with Colonel Washington. It would be impossible for me to do so. The whole scene passed so rapidly that it hardly made a distinct impression upon my mind. I can only recall the fleeting picture of an old man kneeling with a carbine in his hand, with a long gray beard falling away from his face, looking quickly and keenly toward the danger that he was aware had come upon him. He was not a large man, being perhaps five feet ten inches when he straightened up in full. His dress, even, I do not remember distinctly. I should say that he had his trousers tucked in his boots, and that he wore clothes of gray—probably no more than trousers and shirt. I think he had no hat upon his head.

None of the prisoners were hurt. They were badly frightened and somewhat starved. I received no wounds except a slight scratch on one hand as I was getting through the hole in the door. Colonel Lee and the people on the outside thought I was wounded.

Brown had, at the time, only five or six fighting men, and I think he himself was the only one who showed fight after I entered the engine-house. There were no provisions in the building, and it would have been only a question of time when Brown would have had to surrender. Colonel Washington was the only person inside the house that I knew.

I have been asked what became of Brown's carbine. That I do not know. My sword was left in Washington, among people with whom I lived, and I lost trace of it. A few years ago, after having come out of the war and gone west to Dakota, where I now live, I received a letter from a gentleman in Washington, saying that he knew where the sword was, and that it was still bent double, as it was left by the thrust upon Brown's breast. He said that it was now a relic of great historic value, and asked me to assent to the selling of it upon the condition that I should receive a portion of the price of the weapon. To me the matter had very little interest, and I replied indifferently. Since then I have heard nothing of the matter. I presume the saber could be found somewhere in Washington.

ISRAEL GREEN.